Additional comment on Caro's "The Years of Lyndon Johnson" 11/15/90
and how it was in LBJ'd youth and mine (First volume)

One of the justified criticisms of the second volume of this trilogy is that Caro portrayed Coke Stevenson, from whom LBJ stole his election as senator, as a much better man than he was. To my knowledge he has done this also with Sam Rayburn in Part III, Chapter 18, pp. 306 ff. This is not to say that Caro was in any way inaccurate. Rayburn was, without question, an indispensibel part of enacting the FDR legislation, particularly those laws relating to controls on the greedy wealthy.

However, there was another side to Rayburn's career as majority leader. For example, his undeviating support of the Dies UnAmerican committee. Even though his politics and those of Dies and his fellow committee members, selected by Rayburn or requiring his approval, from the Democtratic majority, were quite different. Martin Dies, of Texas, was an extremist of the right and utterly irresponsible and dishonest. Joe Starnes of Alabama, the vice chairman, was a pleasant and friendly man, which Dies wasn't (I knew them both but had only been introduced to Rayburn, with whom I had no personal contact) but he was also of the far right and like Dies a racist.

Rayburn also never did a thing to restrain the committee's excesses and he supported each and every extension of its life. And only those who lived through this committee's career or studied it can have any notion of how UnAmerican it was, how it set out to violate all American belief and tradition and not infrequently law, how it was determined to hurt people and causes, including unions, how utterly irresponsible and pro-fascist it and its members were.

I have personal knowledge of one of the personal favors Rayburn extended to Dies.

One day when I was at the Capitol, and I presume that the committee knew I'd be there as the result of some kind of surveillance because it was well prepared for what happened, some of its people grabbed me and led me to an office just off the House floor, on the south side it it, and held a hearing. It was prepared for this with a court reporter and with staff and members sitting and waiting for me to be brought in. They were also prepared to sit me close to the radiator, where I'd be uncomfortably warm while they questioned me. The room was Rayburn's hide-away, as they were then called on the Hill. It also contained a supply of his liquor. On at least one occasion, of which I have a clear recollection, and possibly more, because other things occupied my mind then, a man entered, went to a cabinet, and left with liquor, a bottle or more. I remember that he wore riding pants and boots.

Rayburn did not have to support those awful people and if he had been the kind of man Caro protrays he would not have been. He did not have to designate Dies as chairman and he could not have been ignorant of the fact that in campaigning for the post Dies was openly anti-Semitic. He made such references to the previous vice-chairman, Sam Dickstein of New York. (Which it happens I knew then.) Dies went around assuring the right-wing Democrats that there would not be any Jews on his committee if he chaired it. And he was already well known as anti labor. (Before Dies it was known as the McCormack-Dichstein committee. John McCormack was the chairman, later majority leader, from Mass.)

When Rayburn was majority leader all the extensions of the committee's life were enacted with an overwhelming Democratic majority and with Rayburn's support. And before the first extension it was more than apparent that the committee was in lusty opposition to all that FDR wanted to do and to him and even to his wife.

In Chapter 19, on the National Youth Administration, which I've just begun reading, Caro says that the average depression wage for teen agers was 10 cents an hour. Not where I lived and worked and when, as from time to time I did, I had NYA employment, the wage was 30 cents an hour. I worked in the library for that, 90 cents a night, after which I hsd to hitchhike home, 12 or more miles, beginning about 10:15 p.m., and in the School of Agriculture, where I did public relations work. It was bad and hard, but not as bad as 10¢ an hour where I lived. But I did have to use paper and cardboard when my shoe soles wore through. Half-soles cost $1.00, more than a night's work grossed.